



## Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

In a recent team game, I held:

♠ 9 4 ♥ J 7 5 3 ♦ J 8 7 6 4 2 ♣ 6

Partner	Me
2♣	2♦
2♠	3♣
3♠	Pass

In response to our strong 2♣ opening, 2♦ is either negative or waiting. 3♣ is a second negative. When opener bids and rebids his suit, it is not forcing. I passed, partner took 10 tricks and we lost 10 IMPs! Was this unlucky or is it better to play 2♣ as an absolute game force? Incidentally, partner held:

♠ A K 10 8 6 5 ♥ K Q ♦ A Q ♣ A 9 3.

Only a trump lead would have defeated the game.

JK

Dear JK,

By any chance, is your last name Rowling?

In my opinion, it is best to play that only two auctions that open 2♣ (strong, artificial, forcing)–2♦ (negative or waiting) permit the partnership to stop short of game.

1.	2♣	2♦
	2NT	Pass

This sequence brackets opener's values to 22–24 high-card points and balanced distribution. Responder is

encouraged to use his superior math skills and, with a balanced hand and 0–2 HCP, conclude that game is unlikely. If he chooses to bid, Stayman and transfers are still an option.

2.	2♣	2♦
	2M	3♣
	3M	

(M = Major)

Defining responder's first 2♦ as negative or waiting shows either 0–7 HCP, or 8 or more HCP without a five-card (or longer) suit that contains two of the top three honors. After opener bids his suit for the first time, it is 100% forcing for one round because, while the floor of his values is established (8.5–9 tricks), the ceiling is unlimited. Note the difference between this and the more precisely defined 2NT rebid.

When responder follows artificially with 3♣ over opener's suit rebid, he describes a terrible hand, usually at most 3 HCP, with a willingness to stop short of game despite partner's powerful bidding. For example, responder holds:

♠ 8 4 ♥ 8 6 5 2 ♦ 9 5 4 ♣ 9 7 5 2.

Opener	Responder
2♣	2♦
2♠	3♣
3♠	?

With this pointless, shapeless collection, responder should pass. Say, however, the auction starts:

Opener	Responder
2♣	2♦
2♠	3♣
3♦/3♥	?

Responder is forced to speak. Only when opener bids and rebids the same suit after responder has issued a second negative can the auction screech to a halt.

You suggest that "only a trump lead could defeat the game." For starters, the opponents need to lead a trump; otherwise, by ruffing two clubs in the dummy, you would be a strong favorite to lose at most three tricks. On a trump lead, you could ruff one club in dummy, and if the diamond finesse works, you are still a favorite.

With a doubleton trump and a ruffing value, you have a clear-cut obligation to boost partner to game: Add your likely trick (the club ruff) to the 8.5–9 tricks he has and you want to be in game. Flip-flop your black-suit holdings and you have an equally clear obligation to pass, because 10 tricks would verge on the impossible unless you are Harry Potter.

You will never get rich going low on close games at IMP scoring. Facing any close decision about game, simply bid it and try to make it. ■